

# A NIGHTMARE ON BLOB STREET

Director Chuck Russell owned the 1980's with a string of horror hits.

By JOHN NICOL Introduction by CHRIS ALEXANDER

Chuck Russell is no stranger to shock. Though mainstream Hollywood might remember him best as the man who turned Jim Carrey into a living, breathing Tex Avery cartoon in 1994's *THE MASK*, it was his work calling the shots on 1987's hugely successful sequel *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 3: THE DREAM WARRIORS* and 1988's outrageously slime-soaked remake of *THE BLOB* that will forever place him high on the shrine of horror fans worldwide.

And yet, his work in the genre is even more storied, having line produced the cult Trish Van Devere (ahem) vehicle *THE HEARSE*, written the underrated fantasy film *DREAMSCAPE* (itself, a bit of a foreshadowing of the first *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET*) and executive produced

the Linda Blair slasher *HELL NIGHT*. His is truly a life steeped in shock...

*DELIRIUM* had the honor of chatting Chuck up about his work in horror for the following exclusive interview. Endure...

**DELIRIUM:** You've had an incredible past in horror. Walk us through your career up to *THE HEARSE*...

**CHUCK RUSSELL:** I'm from Chicago originally, and did quite a bit of theater at University of Illinois as both an actor and director. I got interested in the whole theater scene in Chicago, which is still a great theater city. I had always shot film from junior high on and knew I wanted to be a filmmaker. But when you're from the Midwest, a film career seems like a long shot. Film school was not an option so, after graduating from the University of Illinois, I just decided to give LA a try. I didn't have much of a plan; just drove out in a Ford Pinto, clueless but sincere. I was almost broke, knew nobody and showed up for production assistant jobs wearing a



coat and tie, which was not smart. I actually started work sweeping stages and worked my way up the ladder in film production. I was always writing scripts during this period. I also figured with a couple of producing credits it would be easier to get my first directing gig. Which is how I ended up doing *THE HEARSE*.

**DELIRIUM:** *THE HEARSE* was your entry point and *HELL NIGHT* was your sophomore picture; did these moves help your career?

**RUSSELL:** *THE HEARSE* and *HELL NIGHT* weren't my inventions, but they were a good chance to produce horror films at the time. My job was to make them a bit better and learn the craft as fast as I could. On low budget horror, you basically help out in every department, so it was quite an education. I met my future writing partner and good friend Frank Darabont on *HELL NIGHT*, when I hired





him as a production assistant. Frank, of course, went on to do *SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION* and *THE GREEN MILE* (and spearheaded TV's *THE WALKING DEAD* – Ed)

**DELIRIUM:** What was it like working with Linda Blair?

**RUSSELL:** It was great, Linda was maturing then as an actress and was great to work with, she was very thoughtful about the production itself. After *THE EXORCIST* there was a lot on her shoulders, expectations of a sort.

**DELIRIUM:** Most of your films resonate with the fans and *DREAMSCAPE* is no exception.

**RUSSELL:** We were maybe just a little ahead of our time...that was a great idea and we all put our hearts into it...it's the beauty of independent film making; some of those first films I did were some of the most fun and creative experiences I've had, especially *DREAMSCAPE*... I mean, we broke a few rules and had to play around with some really interesting new ideas. We were very lucky, we got Max von Sydow and Christopher Plummer to take on our two character leads. I also had tremendous luck with finding new talent. (Director) Joe Ruben and I fought really hard for Dennis Quaid. He was a

very new and young actor at the time. He was a standout, we kinda had to sell him hard to the producers, but the results were truly great and it was a perfect stepping stone for Dennis's career. He's got that twinkle in his eye; a great-hearted

could grow on the third *ELM STREET*, how he could do things and go a little further into more imaginative scenarios...and introducing some comedy which the series had not previously done. Wes's first *ELM STREET* was such a



man who always had a bit of a devil in him; that shows in his performance and comes through in the character. Dennis was still untested as a leading man at the time...but we knew he'd be great in the part.

**DELIRIUM:** Of course, I loved those glowing nunchucks as a kid...

**RUSSELL:** Oh yes...that's actually really interesting. I was inspired by *ENTER THE DRAGON*. When I was kid I saw it six times. I couldn't get over Bruce Lee and his really imaginative fight scenes so I guess it was my little homage to Bruce Lee.

**DELIRIUM:** Can you give a little backstory on *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 3*?

**RUSSELL:** I was doing different production jobs which kinda ranged from assistant directing to line-producing, so by the time I got my opportunity to direct, I had sort of proven myself as a writer and I was reliable on set as an assistant director; so New Line figured that was enough of a background to give me a chance directing *DREAM WARRIORS*. I actually drew some of the film's storyboards; I'm a sketch-artist as well, I did a set of my own storyboards on how I thought Freddy

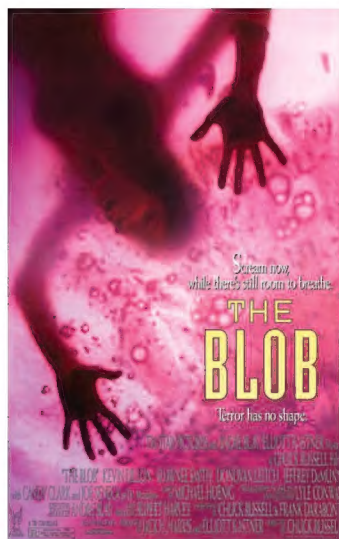
breakthrough in the horror genre, I actually thought it was so frightening, that the best we could do was concentrate on character and the kids themselves as a team, and bring in a little more comedy, a formula that seemed to really work with the audiences. These films have amazing fans. People still love *DREAM WARRIORS* and *THE BLOB*. I sat with audiences recently for some charity events and watched them immersing themselves still. It's interesting; those pictures have a life of their own. What consistently worked about them was that the teens could only rely on each other. All the parents ever wanted to do was send them to bed, and the kids knew that's how you got killed in the *ELM STREET* world. The kids were right for once. I think that still resonates with the fans. Growing up and bonding with your friends in the teen years and realizing bad things do happen in the real world which can create a feeling of isolation. Bonding with your peers against ignorant parents for your survival played off well.

**DELIRIUM:** *ELM STREET 3* was also your big leap into the director's chair. Was this a natural progression for you?

**RUSSELL:** I came to Hollywood looking







to direct; I still enjoy producing and of course I still enjoy writing, but directing is the one job where I got to use everything in the arts that I know. It's the most fun and the most challenging, and the ability to do some of the visuals and just interacting with actors and the extreme situations – there is nothing like it. When you're producing, you're a creator, you're developing a screenplay, you're putting together the pieces that'll make it into a hit movie, you hope. When you're directing, you are really on the front line every day and I love the actors, I love the rehearsals and the theater part of the

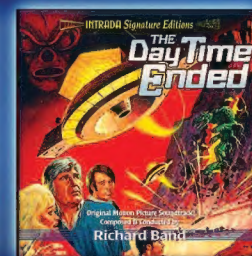
experience...translating it into film and the magic tricks we can do now with the wide range of visual effects. For me, it was an easier transition...

**DELIRIUM:** Was there any fan resistance when came to remaking THE BLOB?

**RUSSELL:** The worst pressure came from myself wanting to hit a pop culture note with remaking a film like that. I felt like there was room for improvement, but there was just something so crazy about the original that it stuck in people's imagination. The struggle on THE BLOB was that I was aware of CGI, but it was too early... I actually thought I was going to

be able to do some CG work with THE BLOB, but we found that the CGI was just not organic enough at the time... It wasn't until I did THE MASK that CGI came through and the programs and software were a little more advanced for doing more organic things. With THE BLOB, we experimented with CGI and hoped to incorporate it, but I really did have to fall back on all physical effects which made that film tough for a small, low-budget film. We were constantly innovating ways, all kinds of silicone and puppetry and full-scale effects and animated effects... just any number of ways to move that blob! 🍷

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